

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 07649 141120Z
ACTION HA-05

INFO OCT-01 EA-10 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO USMISSION GENEVA
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CONFIDENTIAL BANGKOK 7649

FOLLOWING TEL SENT ACTION AMEMBASSY BANGKOK; INFO VIENTIANE
DATED MAR 13 REPEATED FOR YOUR ACTION:

QUOTE
UDORN 0061

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF TH LA
SUBJECT: REFUGEE SITUATION IN UBON

1. DURING TRIP TO UBON PROVINCE MARCH 8-11, CONSUL FINNEY VISITED REFUGEE CAMP, MET WITH GOVERNOR PRAMOON CHANCHAMNON, AND TOURED PROVINCE'S SEVEN EASTERN DISTRICTS BORDERING ON LAOS TO OBTAIN UPDATE ON REFUGEE SITUATION.

2. UBON REFUGEE CAMP - ADMINISTRATION OF CAMP SEEKS POOR IN COMPARISON WITH OTHER LARGE CAMPS IN REGION, SUCH AS NONG KHAI AND LOEI. SMALL THAI STAFF, WHILE DISPLAYING BENIGN ATTITUDE TOWARD REFUGEES, DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE WELL-ORGANIZED OR VERY COMPETENT. CONTROLS OVER ENTRY AND EXIT OF REFUGEES, WHO ARE PERMITTED TO WORK OUTSIDE OF CAMP IN UBON CITY, ARE LAX.

3. AS RESULT, ESTIMATES OF CAMP POPULATION VARY. THAI
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 BANGKO 07649 141120Z

CAMP COMMANDER REPORTS 15,000, CONSISTING OF 13,200 REGISTERED REFUGEES ANDA AN ESTIMATED 1800 AWAITING INSRIPTION ON OFFICIAL ROSTER. REFUGEE CAMP COMMANDER CLAIMS TOTAL POPULATION OF 16,800. UNHCR REP, CITING OTHER REFUGEE SOURCES, ESTIMATES 17,500 REFUGEES IN CAMP.

4. ALTHOUGH CAMP'S RATE OF POPULATION INCREASE HAS DECLINED

NOTABLY SINCE LATE 1977, IT STILL EXCEEDS THAT OF ANY OTHER CAMP IN NORTHEAST. REFUGEE CAMP CHIEF ESTIMATES 1700-2000 REFUGEES ADMITTED TO CAMP DURING PAST TWO MONTHS. MEW ARRIVALS APPEAR TO BE COMBINATION OF THOSE WHO RECENTLY CROSSED BORDER FROM LAOS AND THOSE ROUNDED UP BY THAI AUTHORITIES WHILE RESIDING ILLEGALLY IN OUTLYING DISTRICTS.

5. ANTI-LPDR RESISTANCE ACTIVITY SEEMS MORE PRONOUNCED IN UBON CAMP THAN IN ANY OTHER IN REGION, ALTHOUGH IT STILL ONLY INVOLVES A SMALL PERCENTAGE OF CAMP POPULATION. IT IS REPORTED THAT RESISTANCE ELEMENTS WITH CLOSE LINKS TO CAMP PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN BRINGING OUT RELATIVES OF CAMP INHABITANTS FROM LAOS. (WE WILL REPORT FURTHER ON RESISTANCE ACTIVITY AS IT AFFECTS REFUGZE SITUATION IN SEPTEL),

6. GOVERNOR PRAMOON CHANCHAMNON - INFORMED CONSUL THAT HENRY KAMM'S FEBRUARY 18 NY TIMES ARTICLE REPORTING FORCED REPATRIATION OF REFUGEES FROM UBON PROMPTED VISIT TO GOVERNOR BY UNHCR LEGAL EXPERT FROM BANGKOK. GOVERNOR PRAMOON STATED THAT SHORTLY THEREAFTER HE RECEIVED NEW DIRECTIVE FROM MOI GRANTING HIM DISCRETIONAL AUTHORITY TO ADMIT TO UBON CAMP POST-NOVEMBER 15 REFUGEES WHO ALREADY HAVE RELATIVES IN CAMP.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BANGKO 07649 141120Z

7. AT SAME TIME, HE CLAIMED THAT NUMBERS OF NEW REFUGEES ENTERING PROVINCE HAD DROPPED MARKEDLY IN LAST SEVERAL MONTHS AND EXPRESSED HIS BELIEF THAT INFUX IS LIKELY TO STAY AT LOW LEVEL AS LONG AS RTG EXCLUSIONARY POLICY, WHICH HE FAVORS, REMAINS IN EFFECT.

8. TOUR OF BORDER DISTRICTS - REVEALED LITTLE NEW INFORMATION BUT CONFIRMED SEVERAL IMPRESSIONS REGARDING REFUGEE SITUATION WE HAD OBTAINED FROM SECOND-HAND SOURCES. DISTRICT OFFICERS ARE WELL-BRIEFED REGARDING RTG EXCLUSIONARY POLICY. THEY REPORT SENDING BACK, PRIMARILY THROUGH PERSUASION, TOTAL OF 200-28 REFUGEES TO LAOS SINCE NOVEMBER 15, 1977. THEY CLAIM THAT THEY HAVE NOT WITNESSED OR HEARD OF ANY REPRISALS TAKEN BY LPDR AUTHORITIES AGAINST RETURNED REFUGEES.

9. DISTRICT OFFICIALS ESTIMATE THAT A SOMEWHAT LARGER NUMBER OF REFUGEES, EXCEEDING TOTAL OF THOSE RETURNED, HAVE SUCCESSFULLY ENTERED THEIR DISTRICTS SINCE NOVEMBER 15 TO LIVE WITH RELATIVES AND FRIENDS. THEY RECKON NUMBER OF REFUGEES RESIDING ILLEGAGLY IN SEVEN DISTRICTS AT 6000-8000. MOST OF THEM ARE LIVING IN BUNTARIK

KHONG CHIAM, AND KHEMARAT DISTRICTS. WE ENCOUNTERED FEW
REFUGEES IN DISTRICT JAILS.

10. WDISTRICT AUTHORITIES STATE THAT GREATLY REDUCED
INFLUX OF REFUGEES FROM SOUTHERN LAOS SINCE NOVEMBER 15, 1977
CONSISTS MAINLY OF RURAL OR SMALL TOWNSPEOPLE WITH AN
OCASSIONAL FORMER SOLDIER OR VIENTIANE GOVERNMENT
OFFICIAL. THEY QUOTE REFUGEES AS CITING LACK OF FREEDOM,
POVERTY AND EXPLOITATION BY LPDR LOCAL OFFICIALS AS MAIN
REASONS FOR FLEEING LAOS. THEY CLAIM THAT A FEW REFUGEES
HAVE RETURNED TWO OR THREE TIMES AFTER BEING SENT
BACK TO LAOS.

11. COMMENT: WE ENCOUNTERED NOTICEABLE TENDENCY ON PART
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 BANGKO 07649 141120Z

OF SOME LOCAL OFFICIALS TO AVOID SPEAKING CANDIDLY ABOUT
REFUGEE SITUATION IN THEIR DISTRICTS. THEY WERE RELUCTANT
TO ADMIT TO ARRIVAL OF NEW REFUGEES SINCE IT SUGGESTED
THEY ARE NOT CARRYING OUT EXCLUSIONARY POLICY EFFECTIVELY.
THEY WERE ALSO EVASIVE IN TALKING ABOUT FORCED
REPATRIATION. HOWEVER, THE MAJORITY OF OFFICIALS APPEAR

RESIGNED TO FACT THAT A FEW NEW REFUGEES ARE GOING TO
SLIP INTO THEIR DISTRICTS REGARDLESS OF EFFORTS TO STOP
THEM. NONE OF DISTRICT OFFICIALS INTERVIEWED BELIEVED
THAT RETURN TO PRE-NOVEMBER 15 POLICY OF FULLY ACCEPTING
REFUGEES FROM LAOS SERVES THAILAND'S BEST INTERESTS.

SIGNED FINNEY. UNQUOTE.

WHITEHOUSE

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